



MARCH HEALTH TIP



March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Colorectal cancer, which is commonly called colon cancer, affects both men and women of all racial and ethnic groups, and is most often found in people aged 50 years or older. Of cancers that affect both men and women, colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the United States, but it doesn't have to be. If everybody aged 50 or older had regular screening tests, as many as 60% of deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented.

Knowing how colorectal cancer begins and how to stop it from developing can save your life. And it starts with screening. Talk to your doctor about your risk of developing colorectal cancer, as well as preventive measures you can take early on to protect your health. Colorectal cancer almost always develops from precancerous polyps (or abnormal growths) in the colon or rectum. Screening tests can find precancerous polyps, so that they can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening tests can also find colorectal cancer early, when treatment works best.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all adults begin regular screening after they turn 50 years of age. However, your doctor may choose to screen earlier if you have a close family member with a history of colon cancer, inflammatory bowel disease, or other hereditary conditions. Work with your doctor to establish how frequently you will need screening for colon cancer.

Knowing and addressing your risk factors can also help to reduce your chances of developing colorectal cancer. Consume a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, avoid excessive weight gain or obesity and aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise per day. Limiting alcohol consumption and not smoking are also things you can do to reduce chances of developing colorectal cancer.

Here at the Frederick County Health Department, free colorectal cancer screening tests and services are offered for qualified residents between 50-64 and to those under 50 years of age who have a family or personal history of colorectal cancer. For more information on these services, please contact the Preventive Health Program at 301-600-3362, or visit us online:
www.frederickcountymd.gov/cancerprevention.

For more information regarding colorectal cancer prevention and treatment, please see the CDC's colorectal cancer page at: www.cdc.gov/cancer/Colorectal.

References:

Basic Information about Colorectal Cancer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), July 18, 2011. http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/%5C.

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Colon Cancer: Prevention. Mayo Clinic, August 13, 2011. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/colon-cancer/DS00035/DSECTION=prevention>.

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